

Denali

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Denali National Park and Preserve
Alaska



Denali: The High One Student Reading

The Alaska Range

Do you have a mountain near where you live? Students who live near Denali National Park and Preserve in Alaska do. It's the tallest mountain in North America. It's known as Mt. McKinley to many people, but in Alaska, people call it Denali. The word "Denali" means the "High One" in the native Athabascan language. At 20,320 feet (6,194 meters), it's definitely high!



(NPS Photo Tim Rains)

Denali is part of the Alaska Range, a 600-mile (966-km) long range of mountains. The Alaska Range stretches from the Alaska Peninsula in the west to the Canadian border in the east. The Alaska Range is highest in its middle. That's where you will find Denali National Park and Preserve. Denali is an area of towering peaks and massive glaciers.



Denali National Park and Preserve

Mt. McKinley National Park was established in 1917. In 1980, it was renamed Denali National Park and Preserve. The Park now covers 6 million acres (that's almost twice the size of the state of Connecticut!). Besides all of the tall mountains in the park, you will also find large areas of tundra and taiga forests. Many different types of birds and mammals live in the park, including ptarmigan, Dall sheep, grizzly bears, black bears, caribou, wolves, and moose.



Grizzly bear



Dall sheep



Caribou



Black bear

Seven Summits

Mountain-climbers from around the world come to Alaska to climb Denali. It is one of the Seven Summits. The Seven Summits include the tallest mountains on each of the seven continents. Many other people visit Denali National Park and Preserve to enjoy its scenic beauty and wildlife. They all hope to catch a glimpse of Denali when it's not being hidden by clouds. It is said that only 30% of the visitors who come to Denali actually get to see the mountain.

Geology in Denali

Geology is an important part of the Park. The word "geology" comes from the Greek word that means Earth. Geology is the science that deals with Earth's history, what it's made of, and how it's put



**Glaciers are slow-moving rivers of ice.
(Photo Sue Jagoda)**

together. Geologists study forces that shape Earth's surface: drifting continents, earthquakes, volcanoes, and glaciers. They also study landforms, features of the Earth's surface. Visitors to the Park experience the beautiful and complex geology that is there, including the mountains, glaciers, rocks and streams. The geology of Denali is very complex.

Geologists are only beginning to piece together its puzzling past. The Park has rock formations that have been carried here from thousands of miles away, fossils of ancient creatures that have been plowed up from ocean depths, new rocks made deep within the Earth's core, and some of the oldest rocks in Alaska.

The Earth's mountain-building forces have created spectacular peaks in the Alaska Range. Denali's elevation and its distance from the equator are the reasons it's always winter on top. Some of the snow never melts. Over time the snow is squeezed together to form glaciers, slow-moving rivers of ice. The glaciers in Denali have created many interesting landforms.

Geologists have lots of questions about what they observe at Denali. How are mountains born? What are they made of? Why is Denali so big? How do glaciers form? How does the mountain impact Alaska's climate? Why are there so many different kinds of rocks in Denali National Park and Preserve? These are just some of the questions that challenge geologists and other scientists who come to study Denali. There are still many unanswered questions about Denali's geology.

Photo Credits: p. 1 Moose, wolf tracks (Sue Jagoda); Grizzly bear, Dall sheep, Caribou, Black bear (NPS photos).